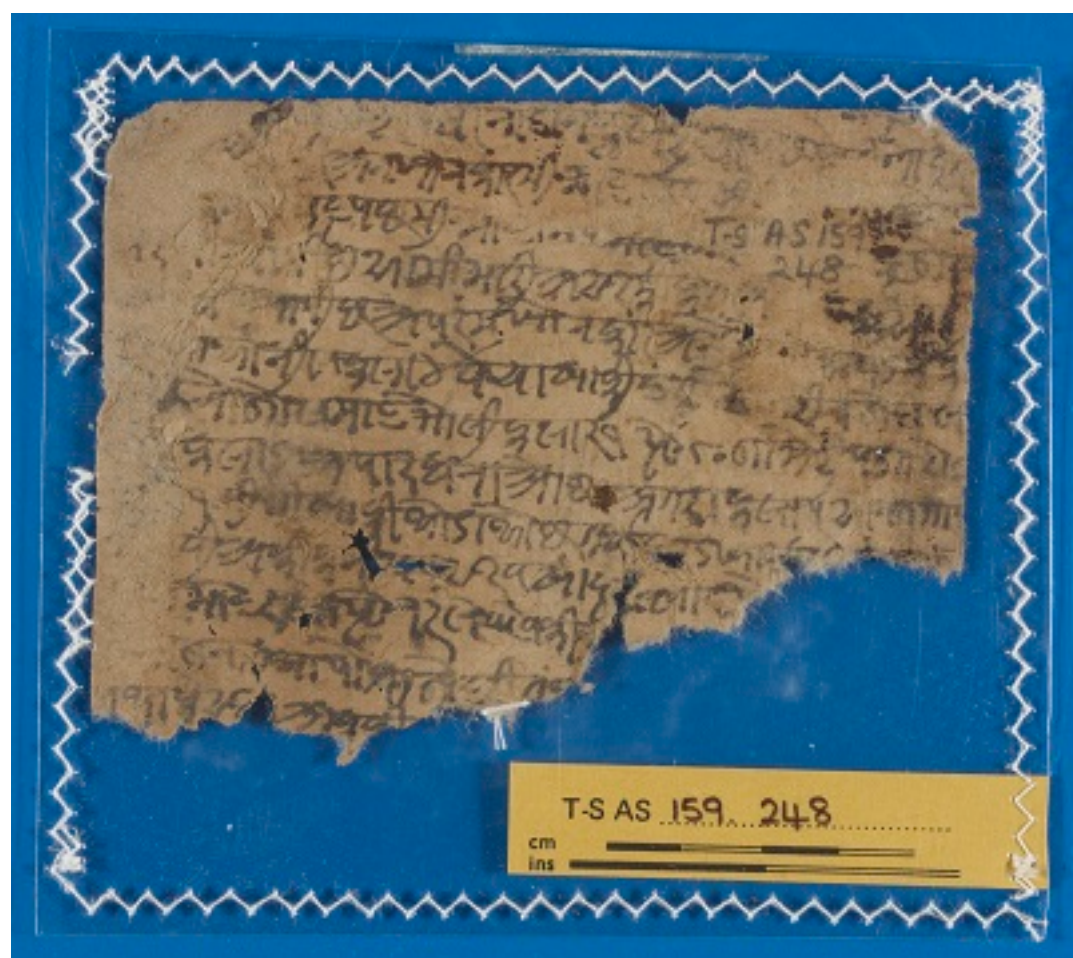


Fragment of the Month: March 2008

T-S AS 159.248, T-S AS 159.247: an unidentified Indian language

Gideon Bohak



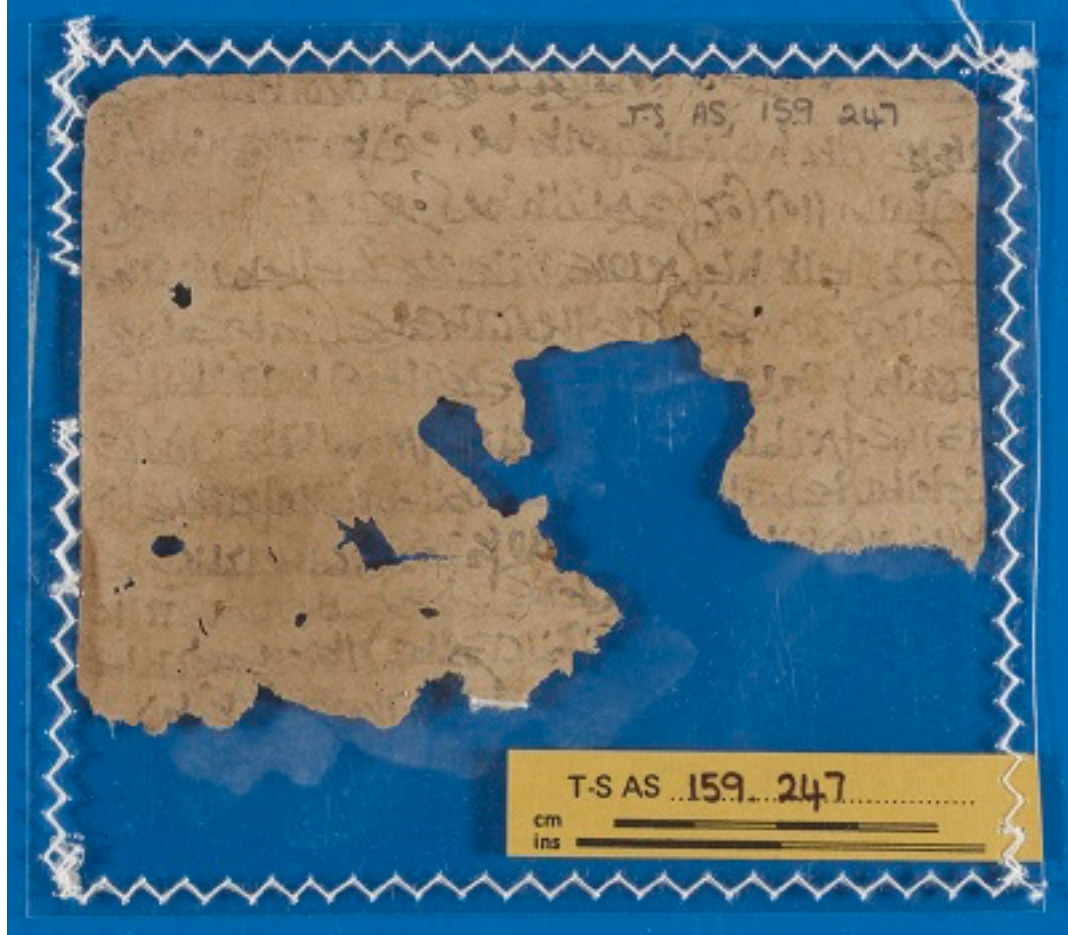
T-S AS 159.248 recto

While searching for new magical, astrological, divinatory and alchemical fragments in the Cambridge Genizah collections, I chanced upon two fragments (T-S AS 159.247, T-S AS 159.248) which seemed to be written in a form of Devanāgarī script. Craig Jamieson, the CUL librarian in charge of Indian languages, confirmed that this indeed was the script, but neither he nor the other experts to whom he showed these fragments were certain about the language in which they were written. And Mordechai Akiva Friedman, who has recently supplemented and prepared for publication the English version of Goitein's celebrated *India Book*, assured us that as far as he can tell Goitein was unaware of the existence of Indian-language fragments from the Cairo Genizah.



T-S AS 159.248 verso

The first fragment (T-S AS 159.248) measures 8.6 x 11.4. From its external appearance (esp. the type and quality of the paper), we can tell that it is likely to date to the “classical” Genizah period (10th to 13th century CE). From its layout — with the verso “flipped over” on an horizontal axis in relation to the recto — we can perhaps surmise that it is a letter. And the fact that it was found in the Genizah might indicate that it was somehow connected with the India trade of the Middle Ages, which is extremely well documented by many other Genizah fragments, as can be seen from the above-mentioned India Book. This assumption might be supported by the apparent presence within the text of Indian numerals, which would fit well in a business letter of some sort. The second fragment (T-S AS 159.247) measures 8.2 x 11.3, and seems to have some faded text on the recto (the verso is blank), but a closer examination reveals that the ink marks are merely the imprint of the letters of the first fragment. Originally, this fragment must have been blank, but it probably traveled together with the first fragment, as may also be deduced from the similar pattern of their gradual disintegration. Beyond that, however, we are at a loss as to the language in which these fragments were written or their actual contents. We therefore decided to make them available here, in the hope that the combined efforts of our visitors might lead to the solution of this intriguing conundrum.



T-S AS 159.247 recto

Readers are invited to send comments to genizah@lib.cam.ac.uk. The Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit is not under any obligation to acknowledge or to publish comments.

Bibliography

Goitein, S.D. and Friedman, M.A., *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza "India Book"*, Leiden: Brill, 2007.

If you enjoyed this Fragment of the Month, you can find others here.

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